DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 929 CS 005 734

AUTHOR Burns, Bonnie
TITLE What to Do While Waiting for Reading to Be Taught in the Content Areas.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Secondary Reading League (Oakbrook, IL, November 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Area Reading; Directed Reading Activity; Junior High Schools; *Reading Instruction; Reading Skills; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The traditional approach to reading in the content areas has been to teach reading skills only in reading class, usually using literature or narrative selections and expecting transfer of those skills to content texts or other expository materials. The transfer of those reading skills has been such a disappointing experience that even students who are competent in the traditional reading skills have difficulty coping with the particular skills necessary in the content areas. Reading specialists have been trying to convince content teachers that preparing and guiding students in the reading of their textbooks will help students learn and remember more of the content, but a poll of secondary students from a variety of subject areas shows that teachers do not stress the importance of reading assignments. Rather than waiting for reading in the content areas to be taught, reading teachers can do it themselves. A successful program in a suburban Chicago, Illinois, school uses content materials to teach reading, such as a science text for comparison and contrast format or a history text for cause and effect. The units are based on the specific skill involved rather than literary themes. The approach works well as long as each component is integrated into a whole process. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED195929

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING FOR READING TO BE TAUGHT IN THE CONTENT AREAS

Paper presented at
The Secondary Reading League
November 3, 1979

Bonnie Burns

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bonnie Burns

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS805734

The traditional approach to reading in the content areas has been to teach reading skills only in the reading class, usually using literature or narrative selections and expecting transfer of those skills to content texts or other expositional materials. The transfer of reading skills has been such a disappointing experience that reading in the content areas is one of the most discussed topics in reading circles today. Even students who are competent in the traditional reading skills are having difficulty coping with the particular skills and habits necessary for success in the content areas. The traditional approach has been found lacking.

A second school of thought has been, "Every teacher a reading teacher". Reading specialists have been trying for years to convince content teachers that preparing and guiding students in the reading of their textbookds will help the students learn and remember more of the content, as well as develop their reading skills. Many district reading specialists will tell of the stubborn resistance to this idea and many content teachers will tell that they want to teach content and not process. However, some progress is being made. Several states are mandating at least one reading course for junior and senior high school teacher certification. Texts are being chosen for readability as well as content. Directed reading activities, structured overviews, and SQ3R are showing up in the vocabulary of content teachers, but the resistance still continues. A reading specialist got teacher participants for a reading-in-the-content-areas inservice only by relieving them from outdoor patrol duty.

A devastating article by Dr. Billie Jo Rieck[1] polled secondary students of math, English, art, science, social studies, physical education and home economics. Prior to the students being polled, the teachers had been asked to respond to these questions:

---

[1]Billie Jo Rieck, "How Content Teachers Telegraph Messages Against Reading," Journal of Reading 20 (May 1977) : 646-647.

1. Do you require reading in your course? 33 Yes 1 No
2. Do most of your students read their assignments? 20 Yes 14 No
3. Do your students have any noticeable reading problems? 10 Yes 24 No

Then 300 students of the 14 teachers who answered "no" to question 2 gave the following responses.

1. Do you like to read 52% Yes, 38% No, 10% No response
2. Do you read your assignments in this class? 15% Yes, 81% No, 4% No response
3. Do your tests mainly cover lecture and discussion, or reading assignments? 98% Lecture and discussion
4. Are you required to discuss your reading assignments? 23% Yes, 70% No, 7% No response
5. Does your teacher give you purpose for reading or are you only given the number of pages to read? 95% Pages, 5% Purpose
6. Does your teacher bring in outside material for you to read and recommend books of interest for you to read? 5% Yes, 95% No
7. Does your teacher like to read? 20% Yes, 33% No, 47% Don't know

Rieck summarizes. "Out loud, these teachers are saying: I require reading in this course. All students are to read the assignments. Students are to read X number of pages from the textbook. However, their nonverbal attitude said to the students: 'You really don't have to read the assignments because you aren't tested on them and probably won't have to discuss them. You should read X number of pages, but there is no real reason to do so. Reading really isn't important." So every teacher isn't a reading teacher.

The third approach is entitled, "What should the reading teacher do while waiting for reading to be taught in the content areas?" Don't hold your breath. Do it yourself. The most common means has been to use commercial materials that imitate content textbooks. Reading for Concepts published by Webster McGraw Hill, Go: Reading in the Content Areas by Scholastic, and the basal Bookmark by Harcourt Brace are all excellent materials. The new basals are including some degree of informational articles at almost all grade levels.

The variation used at River Grove School in River Grove, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, is, I believe, more effective and

by far cheaper. That is, use the students' actual content books used in their science and social studies classes as the basis for reading lessons in the reading classroom. Neither the student nor the teacher has to rely on transfer of reading skills because those skills are being applied directly.

Transfer research tells us that the more like the original task, the greater the transfer of learning will be. The implication for the reading teacher is to present a topic or skill and to practice and apply it in its various forms, each closely resembling the way students are expected to use their reading skills in their content classrooms. It is important for students to see and practice the variations of reading, to understand the similarities in skills but the differences in application.

Reading skills have never been taught effectively in isolation. What is taught is most effective within the context that it is used. In other words, if summarizing the main idea is only taught from a workbook or a ditto page, some students think that main ideas are only found in skills lessons. Others at least generalize that main ideas are found in all reading class materials. But a surprizingly large number never generalize that main ideas are also found in science and social studies books, and newspapers. And they may never make that generalization by themselves.

When students practice basic reading skills and apply those skills to textbooks in reading class, they should transfer those skills to their content classes because the tasks will be similar enough to generalize.

Joseph Campione[2] explains it this way. "When something is learned, it is stored along with some contextual information, or context markers. When on succeeding tasks, the context is restored, that information is used. When, however, the context is markedly changed, that information is at least unlikely to be used."

---

[2]Joseph C. Campione, "The Generality of Transfer," Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 15 (1973) : 417.

Sometimes teachers should worry about what students do transfer. Many students transfer the approach they use in reading a story to reading a textbook. They "study" the same way that they read a novel. But content reading requires a different mind set. In addition to the skills required for reading fiction, it includes heavier vocabulary and concept loads, previewing, purpose setting, grouping of ideas, and reviewing for mastery. Students may have these skills but probably lack the practice of applying them together as a cohesive unit. They can have that practice by studying content textbooks in the reading class. Carl Bernard Smith[3] reiterates, "Reading skills are not independent of the purpose for which the material is read, nor can those purposes be independent of the reading skills."

The River Grove curriculum required that skills be taught, practiced, and applied. The application of skills in each unit included fictional narrative selections as well as material from the content areas. Some examples follow.

We organized the curriculum around units of reading skills rather than around literary themes, and chose stories that examplified those skills. The student practiced and applied the skills he learned and saw the purpose for skills study.

Content materials were chosen that examplified the skills unit also. Why stop with the Kenworthy prefix-suffix flip cards when your students can practice decoding this week's science vocabulary? Take a passage from the new history chapter and prepare a cloze type exercise, leaving out especially the difficult words. When encountering the real chapter, they will already have good synonyms. Help your students find context clues in their texts. A student once asked,"Do history books have context clues too?"

All students study reading graphs and charts somewhere in

---

[3]Carl B. Smith and L. Harris, Reading Instruction, 2nd edition. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), p. 316.

the reading curriculum, but many students skip over them entirely in their textbooks. Borrow the science teacher's books and teach part of your unit right out of the science books.

When studying cause and effect, choose a story that is organized by cause and effect or choose a selection from the history book such as the Civil War and help them take notes in a cause and effect format. When working on comparison and contrast, find their science texts and read the veins and arteries section. Biographies are terrific for finding time clues, and so are history books. Be sure to use a story that uses flashbacks when teaching sequencing.

Use common household items as the Sears Catalogue or the Yellow Pages. They are unbeatable for practical usage of alphabetizing and topic-subtopic work. The students get to use their chart and graph skills to find the appropriate parcel post rate and the right tax tables and realize that the same proceedure they learned for multiplying decimals in math class is also appropriate for finding sales tax.

Why study about using an atlas or almanac when the class can use an atlas or almanac in the library? Forget the foolish dittoes about tables of contents and indexes and use the real ones in the English books. Apply the skills that students learned in the resource and reference unit to a research paper, preferably one assigned by a content teacher and take reading class time to help them organize their papers and work in the library. Teach library skills in the library, not out of a workbook.

Let students find the main idea of a daily newspaper article and have them compare it to the clipped off headline. Outline the science chapter that they're currently studying. Show them that their content text has main ideas and supporting details and that being able to find them will help them remember the salient content of that chapter. Good reading skills will aid good science grades.

Real opportunities for using critical reading skills are abundant. Find a columnist in the newspaper, give the students background, and let them seperate fact from opinion. Read letters to the editor for bias. Pick open ended stories that require

students to make their own moral judgements. Richard Wright stories are devastating and folk takes are good also. Examine current advertisements for propaganda techniques. Travel folders are a marvelous source for loaded words, bias and propaganda, and travel agencies are more than willing to unload last season's brochures.

Use mystery stories when studying inferential reading. Let your students match wicswith the best inference maker of all times, Sherlock Holmes.

Teach them flexibility in rate. One doesn't read a science text at the same rate one reads a novel if content is going to be mastered.

The River Grove curriculum also included direct text book study skills proceedures such as SQ3R, study habits, notetaking, and outlining. Skills were applied and content also had to be mastered.

Each of the above suggestiors is an application of reading skills. Skills taught in isolation are just that, isolated pieces of knowledge. Assuming that many students will by themselves transfer the reading skills that have been arduously taught to them to their content texts and to reading materials in their everyday life is almost wishful thinking. The more closely the exercises in reading class resemble the tasks of content reading, the greater the transfer will be.

The junior high program at River Grove was designed to be taught around units based on skills rather than literary themes or following the sequence of a basal. By having one topic for the entire class, it was easy to have whole group lessons, small group sessions based upon the students' competency in that particular skill, or individual assignments. Grouping was flexible and materials multi-level. Intermediate and junior high students need to analyze and apply specific skills at a greater depth, not just on a hit or miss basis or a random approach as the skills come

up in stories. The educational research of Rosenthal and Zimmerman[4] has shown that the more organized and structured the teaching situation, the better the acquisition results and the transfer also tends to be higher.

There has been criticism of skills based programs but there is nothing wrong with breaking reading down into its components as long as it is put back together as a whole process again. That putting back together or application was done in River Grove on every possible occasion. A skill was first studied intensively and then selections were read where that skill was used. This approach yielded results. At the end of the third year of the program, the mean scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests in reading comprehension were 8.0 at the end of 6th grade, 9.5 at the end of 7th grade and 10.2 at the end of 8th grade.

Because the staff wanted to be able to pull the entire class together to apply a skill to students' content texts, it necessitated following a skills curriculum with flexible grouping. In flexible grouping there are multiple instructional groups and a child is not permanently assigned into any one group. A specific group may meet to practice a skill for a day or a month, and that particular set of children may never meet again. There will be a regrouping. Approximately seventy percent of the River Grove students changed groups at least once during the year.

It is not realistic to expect an even profile in the development of reading skills at any age, and especially at the junior high level. Even students who are excellent at literal meaning and research skills may not have yet developed inferential and critical reading skills. This is an ordinary occurance. Similarly, there are many critical thinkers who still can't pronounce a four syllable word.

---

[4]Ted L. Rosenthal and B.J. Zimmerman, "Organization and Stability of Transfer in Vicarious Concept Attainment," Child Development 47 (March 1976) 116.

However, the main reason flexible grouping was used had to do with self esteem. Every child knew that he was part of the unit, an integral part of the group. He was seldom intolerant of the group needing the most practice because he might pretest into that group in the next unit. Children who have been continually placed in the slow groups begin to see themselves in negative terms. Especially as students get older, these negative images are reinforced, motivational levels drop, less effort is given to learning and it becomes a vicious cycle. When a student knows his placement is not permanent, it helps to break the cycle.

Because the teacher does not have to rely on a basal, materials pertaining to the curriculum topic can be pulled from a variety of sources, enough to teach, reteach, or enrich with something suitable for every student in every unit. Content texts then become just another tool. A student moving faster or slower than his group can move to another without loss of continuity. The freedom to pick and choose materials gives flexibility to the teacher but does require planning time to locate all the applicable pages and chapters and, of course, a variety of materials at multiple levels is necessary.

A similar approach was used in Warren Township, Indianapolis, Indiana.[5] Groups having multiple materials based on a curriculum made greater progress than groups following one basal series in grades four and up.

For those readers interested in the day-to-day organizational plan, the following details are provided. At the beginning of each unit, there was a pretest. It might have been part of a reading series management system, a test from another book, or a teacher made test. There was always one day return time on pretest grading. The student knew that the pretest he took

---

[5] Roger L. Rouch, Joyce Frink Chandler, Lloyd C. Fleetwood, "Teaching Books or Teaching Children," Language Arts 52 (September 1975) : 790-792.

yesterday determined his placement today. Once the cut-off points on the pretest were determined, there were no exceptions. It eliminated the student who excused his performance by saying,"I could do better but the teacher never gives me a chance to be in the higher group". There were never complaints about grouping from students or parents because in effect the grouping was student determined. Pretesting was done just before each unit rather than one large diagnostic test at the beginning of the year, because the results were current each time, and students understood the immediacy of pretest determined grouping. Students put forth their best efforts.

Grouping was carried on within the classroom, or between classrooms when two teachers had back-to-back classes. Skills were then taught, applied, and tested at the appropriate levels. Those doing poorly on the post test knew they would be in for several days of intensive practice, while those who had done well would work on an enrichment project, usually related to a story selection. The cycle began again with the next unit and ran continuously through grades six, seven and eight.

The three major objectives of the reading program were to teach skills in depth, to insure transfer of those skills to content area reading, and to build feelings of success and self esteem. It was felt that these things were accomplished through a skills based curriculum, rather than following a leveled basal program, direct application and teaching from content area textbooks, and a system of flexible grouping. With sufficient teacher planning and cataloguing of materials, this proceedure can work at your school with materials you now have at hand.

Bibliography

1. Campione, Joseph C. "The Generality of Transfer." Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 15 (1973) : 407-418.

2. Rieck, Billie Jo. "How Content Teachers Telegraph Messages Against Reading." Journal of Reading 20 (May 1977) : 646-648.

3. Rosenthal, Ted L., and Zimmerman B.J. "Organization and Stability of Transfer in Vicarious Concept Attainment." Child Development 47 (March 1976) : 110-117.

4. Rouch, Roger L. ; Chandler, Joyce Frink; and Fleetwood, Lloyd C. "Teaching Books or Teaching Children." Language Arts 52 (September 1975) : 790-792.

5. Smith, Carl B. and Harris L. Reading Instruction, 2nd edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.